

A Work of Heart: Exploring What Kamulamun (Heart) Means to Mi'kmaw Women

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BACKGROUND

- Heart disease is simply and specifically defined *within Western health care* as several diseases of the heart and blood vessels (Statistics Canada, 2018)
- In 2020, *heart disease was the second leading cause of death* and accounted for over 53,704 deaths in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2020).
- For women in Canada heart disease has been identified as the *leading cause of premature death* (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2019)
- Indigenous women are at a higher risk of experiencing heart disease than non-Indigenous women (Assembly of First Nations, 2007; Tjepkema et al., 2009; Wei-Randall et al., 2013).
- Conklin et al. (2019) state that *Indigenous women have a 76% higher death rate* from CVD than non-Indigenous women in Canada
- The *often imposed Westernized lens* placed upon heart health research is evident throughout the research literature and has shaped much of what we currently know.
- No current research exists regarding Mi'kmaw women and heart health

WHO AM I?

- Mi'kmaw woman, Registered nurse, Assistant Professor with Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty of Nursing and cross appointed with the School of Arts and Social Science, Grenfell Campus, PhD candidate with the University of Alberta, researcher, mother, auntie, wife, daughter and fancy shawl dancer
- Situated in community, within the west coast of Newfoundland
- Family connection to community on both sides of my family; stronger connection through my father's side who is from Flat Bay Newfoundland
- Situated within an Indigenous worldview



PURPOSE

The purpose of my doctoral research is to:

- 1) inquire into the experiences of Mi'kmaw women of the West coast of Newfoundland regarding the meaning of heart in relation to health and wellbeing
- 2) co-conceptualize meaningful and sustainable interventions focused on heart health and wellbeing that are grounded in the knowledge and experiences of women and their communities.



APPROACH/METHODOLOGY

- The research can be said to fit an Indigenous research methodology grounded in community, situated in Mi'kmaw worldview/ways of knowing/ways of being, utilizing a community based participatory research (CBPR) approach.
- The work of Archibald (2008) was initially examined as it is an Indigenous approach that is wholistic, called storywork. There are core principles to Indigenous storywork, which include: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. I acknowledge that these principles are interconnected and woven together much similar to my research work.
- However, the research has lent itself to examining the work as Mi'kmaw research conducted by a Mi'kmaw researcher, accounting for my relational L'nu responsibility
- The work has included storytelling from a Mi'kmaw perspective
- The research is shaped by the continued guidance from Elders and knowledge keepers as I engage in this journey; I have two community members on my supervisory committee

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PARTICIPANTS

- Mi'kmaw women who self-identify as a woman, not limited to or based on sex assigned at birth or current sex characteristics
- Identify as having a lived experience with Mi'kmaw teachings/knowledge
- 4 key participants plus myself

METHODS

- I acknowledge that I am part of the research and I have been documenting my journey throughout
- Participants picked the methods in which they wanted to share their insights and experiences; making it unique to them and how they feel they can best share their understanding; this included outdoor walks, driving in a vehicle and attending gathering events
- Information gathering also occurred informally; as a part of community, I am aware of cultural aspects in which I can identify and examine
 - One such example is the bringing and sharing of strawberries to a gathering
- I was mindful that while I had previous relationships with the women that continuing to cultivate and grow these relationships through the research takes time; continuing long after the completion of the PhD work
- I provided an opportunity for the women to take pictures, to keep a journal, to write creative texts, or engage in art work
- All writings will be brought back to the participants to honor the ways in which they want their experiences reflected. Working closely with community members will be key

RESULTS

- I met with each of the women individually on two occasions specifically designated to talk about the research question
- There were informal discussions that also took place
- All women involved along with myself met online for a group discussion at the end of the individual story sharing to reflect and discuss the research
- The story sharing occurred over approximately 15 months
- I came to acknowledge that my own story has been an awakening that is interconnected and woven together with the women's stories
- Preliminary findings support my knowledge that Mi'kmaw women think of heart as many aspects besides physiological perspective, that heart health and wellness is lifelong beyond the concept of physical place and space, and that they know what they need to have good heart health and wellness.

CONCLUSION

- I am in the unpacking and write up stage of the research
- The research is positioned within a Mi'kmaw *worldview*
- The research *acknowledges and values all types of knowledge*, including ceremony, dreams, spirit, and environment
- The research is not my own but *that of the community I am part of*
- This research holds the opportunity to *give voice to Mi'kmaw women's stories* while increasing knowledge around what Mi'kmaw women think of in relation to "heart"
- This information has the potential to help shape and create better and *more appropriate heart health interventions* for Mi'kmaw women



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